



Press Release

**Congressman John Conyers, Jr.
Michigan, 14th District**

**Ranking Member, U.S. House
Judiciary Committee
Dean, Congressional Black Caucus**

www.house.gov/judiciary_democrats/index.html

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House Passes Conyers Hate Crimes Prevention Act in Historic Vote

Today the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act (H.R. 2662) as an amendment to the Children's Safety Act (H.R. 3132) by a vote of 223-199. A group of 30 moderate Republicans joined the Democratic caucus in supporting the amendment. This was the first time that the hate crimes legislation has ever had a substantive vote in the House.

Representative John Conyers, Jr., the Ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, was joined by Representatives Frank, Ros-Lehtinen, Baldwin and Shays in the reintroducing the legislation on May 26, 2005. Conyers stated that:

"The passage of this legislation is an historic event that has its basis in the anti-lynching efforts of the 1930's. This has truly been a bipartisan effort that was year in the making. I could not be more pleased that 30 Republicans crossed over to vote with us on this bill, which is the first criminal law-based civil rights measure to pass in decades.

Bias crimes are disturbingly prevalent and pose a significant threat to the full participation of all Americans in our democratic society. For the year 2003, the most recently available data, the FBI compiled reports from law enforcement agencies across the country identifying 7,489 criminal incidents that were motivated by an offender's irrational antagonism toward some personal attribute associated with the victim. Law enforcement agencies have identified 9,100 victims arising from 8,715 separate criminal offenses. While every state reported at least a small number of incidents, it is important to note that reporting by law enforcement is voluntary and it is widely believed that hate crimes are seriously under-reported.

Despite the pervasiveness of the problem, current law limits federal jurisdiction over hate crimes to incidents against protected classes that occur only during the exercise of federally protected activities, such as voting. Further, the statutes do not permit federal involvement in a range of cases where crimes are motivated by bias against the victim's perceived sexual orientation, gender, disability or gender identity. This loophole is particularly significant given the fact that four states have no hate crime laws on the books, and another 21 states have extremely weak hate crimes laws.

This legislation will make it easier for federal authorities to prosecute bias crimes by loosening the unduly rigid jurisdictional requirements under federal law, in the same way that the Church Arson Prevention Act. In addition, the bill will provides DOJ assistance for prosecutions at the state and local level

Passage in the House is just the first step. We now must make sure that the Senate follows its past record of support this legislation and then on to the President. In combination with the underlying Child Safety Act, I believe we have our best chance ever of passing this bill into law."

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